

CLAIMS

1. A queue management system for controlling the movement of a group of one or more people through a virtual queue line for a service, comprising:
 - 5 registration means for registering the group, the registration means comprising an information carrier and at least one ID tag for the member(s) of the group, the information carrier bearing a registration code and the at least one ID tag including ID details for identifying the member(s) of the group, the registration means further associating the registration code with an indication of group size and uniquely with the ID details;
 - 10 interface means for enabling communications to and from the group; a processor associated with the interface means and responsive to a communication from the group including a communicator address and the registration code for generating a registration record for the group representing the group size, the ID details and the communicator address;
 - 15 the processor being arranged to receive a communication from the group requesting access to the virtual queue and to monitor the place of the group in the queue line and to trigger a summons signal when the group approaches or reaches the head of the queue line;
 - 20 the interface means being responsive to the summons signal for initiating a communication to the communicator address for summoning the group to the service; and
 - 25 access control apparatus at the service for reading the at least one ID tag and for comparing the ID details with the registration record in order to evaluate whether access to the service should be permitted or prevented.

2. A queue management system according to claim 1, in which the registration means comprises a respective ID tag for each member of the group.
3. A queue management system according to claim 1 or 2, in which the at least one ID tag comprises a portable tab or band.
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4. A queue management system according to any of claims 1 to 3, in which the at least one ID tag includes a member bearing a scannable code.
- 10 5. A queue management system according to any of claims 1 to 3, in which the at least one ID tag is a virtual tag stored in memory on a computer.
6. A queue management system according to claim 5, in which the ID details are in the form of biometric data.
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7. A queue management system according to any preceding claim, in which the information carrier is a card and the registration code is an alphanumeric value.
- 20 8. A queue management system according to claim 7, in which the card is a credit card and the registration code is the credit card number.
9. A queue management system according to any preceding claim, in which the registration means comprise a registration pack including the information carrier and the at least one ID tag.
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10. A queue management system according to any preceding claim, in which the registration means comprise at least one registration station.

11. A queue management system according to any preceding claim, further comprising a personal communicator for the communication of audio or visual messages between the group and the interface means.
- 5 12. A queue management system according to any preceding claim, in which the processor comprises means responsive to receipt of a service selection signal for initiating a timing period, means for calculating a queuing time starting from the beginning of the timing period, and means for generating an indication of an expected service entry time for the group based on the calculated queuing time.
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13. A queue management system according to claim 12, in which the processor comprises a memory for storing a service throughput profile, and in which the calculating means calculates the queuing time based on the stored service throughput profile.
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14. A queue management system according to claim 12 or 13, in which the service throughput profile is based on records of previous use of the service.
- 20 15. A queue management system according to claim 12, 13 or 14, further comprising monitoring apparatus for monitoring an actual service throughput, and in which the processor is arranged to receive information from the monitoring apparatus for updating the service throughput profile.
- 25 16. A queue management system according to any preceding claim, in which the virtual queue line is combined with a physical queue line and in which the processor is arranged to monitor the place of the group in the overall queue line.

17. A queue management system according to any preceding claim, further comprising means for storing an itinerary for the group representing visits for a plurality of services, and in which the processor is arranged to process and manage the itinerary for the group.

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18. A queue management system according to claim 17, further comprising a plurality of itinerary management stations in communication with the processor for enabling the group to create, modify and input the itinerary.

- 10 19. A queue management system for controlling the movement of a group of one or more people through a virtual queue line for a service, comprising:
 at least one ID tag for the member(s) of the group, the at least one ID tag including ID details for identifying the member(s) of the group, the ID details being associated with a unique registration code and a
15 predetermined group size;
 registration apparatus responsive to an input of the registration code in conjunction with a communicator address for the group for registering the group, the registration apparatus being arranged to generate a registration record for the group representing the ID details, the group size, and the communicator address;
20 a processor responsive to a request from the group for access to the virtual queue line for reading the registration record and for monitoring the place of the group in the queue line, the processor being arranged to trigger a summons signal when the group approaches or reaches the head of the queue line;
25 interface means responsive to the summons signal for initiating a communication to the communicator address for summoning the group to the service; and

access control apparatus at the service for reading the at least one ID tag and for comparing the ID details with the registration record for evaluating whether access to the service should be permitted or prevented.

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20. A method of queue management for controlling the movement of a group of one or more people through a virtual queue line for a service, comprising the steps of:

- 10 assigning to the group an information carrier and at least one ID tag for the member(s) of the group, the information carrier bearing a registration code and the at least one ID tag including ID details for identifying the member(s) of the group;
- 15 associating the registration code with an indication of group size and uniquely with the ID details;
- 20 in response to a communication from the group including a communicator address and the registration code, registering the group by generating a registration record for the group representing the group size, the ID details and the communicator address;
- 25 in response to a request from the group for access to the virtual queue, assigning the group a place in the queue line and monitoring the place of the group in the queue line and triggering a summons signal when the group approaches or reaches the head of the queue line;
- in response to the summons signal, initiating a communication to the communicator address for summoning the group to the service; and at the service, reading the at least one ID tag and comparing the ID details with the registration record in order to evaluate whether access to the service should be permitted or prevented.

21. A method of queue management according to claim 20, comprising assigning a respective ID tag for each member of the group.
22. A method of queue management according to claim 20 or 21, comprising providing the at least one ID tag with a scannable code.
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23. A method of queue management according to claim 20 or 21, comprising storing the at least one ID tag as a virtual tag in a memory on a computer.
- 10 24. A method of queue management according to claim 23, comprising scanning the ID details into the computer in the form of biometric data.
25. A method of queue management according to any of claims 20 to 24, in which the step of assigning includes allocating to the group a registration pack including the information carrier and the at least one ID tag.
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26. A method of queue management according to any of claims 20, 23 or 24, in which the step of assigning includes generating the at least one ID tag through a computer recognition process.
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27. A method of queue management according to any of claims 20 to 26, comprising using a personal communicator for the communication of audio or visual messages between the group and the interface means.
- 25 28. A method of queue management according to any of claims 20 to 27, comprising the steps of: in response to receipt of a service selection signal initiating a timing period, calculating a queuing time starting from the beginning of the timing period, and generating an indication of an expected service entry time for the group based on the calculated queuing time.

29. A method of queue management according to claim 28, comprising storing a service throughput profile, and calculating the queuing time based on the stored service throughput profile.

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30. A method of queue management according to claim 28 or 29, in which the service throughput profile is based on records of previous use of the service.

10 31. A method of queue management according to claim 28, 29 or 30, comprising receiving information from the service for updating the service throughput profile.

15 32. A method of queue management according to any of claims 20 to 31, in which the virtual queue line is combined with a physical queue line and comprising monitoring the place of the group in the overall queue line.

20 33. A method of queue management according to any of claims 20 to 32, further comprising storing an itinerary for the group representing visits to a plurality of services, and processing and managing the itinerary for the group.

34. A method of queue management for controlling the movement of a group of one or more people through a virtual queue line for a service, comprising the steps of:

25 assigning at least one ID tag to the member(s) of the group, the at least one ID tag including ID details for identifying the member(s) of the group, the ID details being associated with a unique registration code and a predetermined group size;

- in response to an input of the registration code in conjunction with a communicator address for the group, registering the group by generating a registration record for the group representing the ID details, the group size, and the communicator address;
- 5 in response to a request from the group for access to the virtual queue, assigning the group a place in the queue line and reading the registration record and monitoring the place of the group in the queue line;
- triggering a summons signal when the group approaches or reaches the
10 head of the queue line;
- in response to the summons signal, initiating a communication to the communicator address for summoning the group to the service; and at the service, reading the at least one ID tag and comparing the ID details with the registration record for evaluating whether access to the
15 service should be permitted or prevented.